Step Into The Future

SimCity 2000 Takes The Original SimCity—And You—Into The Next Century

SimCity's sequel is sublime.

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RESOURCES:
SimCity 2000 (Macintosh), $69.95
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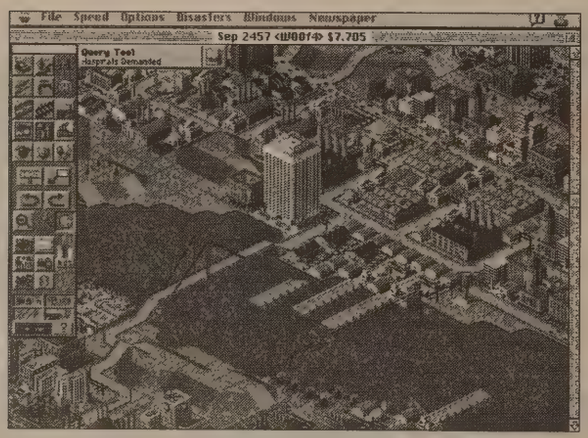
After months of teasing, Maxis has released SimCity 2000, the long-awaited follow-up to SimCity. The original SimCity (now named SimCity Classic) was a fine program, and the first of its kind—focusing on simulating a real-world environment. Since SimCity, Maxis has created a variety of other simulation programs—SimLife, SimAnt, SimEarth, and even SimPower Plant for training real-life energy folks. Maxis has learned what makes a good simulation and an engaging game. It is no surprise that SimCity 2000 is their finest creation.



Those who played the original version of SimCity know the basics: You're a city planner and it's your job to build and sustain a city. Your city is populated by "Sims," finicky citizens who demand the very best from you, their elected official.

Maxis made the game feel incredibly real, especially in comparison to the original SimCity. In SimCity Classic, you could zone commercial, industrial, and residential property, plus a collection of other sites including police forces, fire departments, and stadiums. With SimCity 2000, you can zone "dense" or "light" residential, commercial, and industrial areas—plus you can build seaports, airports, marinas, zoos, stadiums (you choose the sport), schools, colleges, libraries, museums, hospitals, bus stations, and others. You're no longer limited to fixed-size zones—you can create zones, airports, and seaports of any size (limited, of course, by your budget).

How do you keep the Sims happy? Keep taxes low and crime down, create jobs, and educate the citizens. The game offers copious information about how you fare as a city official. You can "query" any piece of property for information—you'll receive pertinent (and sometimes not-so-pertinent) data about the locale. Query a college or school and you are shown its rating as well as number of students and teachers. In residential zones you are told crime and pollution levels. Point to a statue and find out how many pigeons are perched there. Instead of the simple voter opinion poll of SimCity Classic, you can now read the local newspapers to learn what the Sims think of you. (The number of newspapers available depends on the size of your city.)

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The availability of power plants changes depending on the year—you can't build nuclear plants in 1900. Your power choices include coal, solar, wind, microwave, and fusion. Each type of power has its own characteristics, lifespan, and of course, price. Power plants don't last forever so it is important to keep enough money to replace them when they get old. Try an all solar powered city, then watch the solar collectors explode after fifty years. Ouch!

If you didn't save enough money, sell some bonds. Of course, you will have to pay the bonds back, with interest. Fortunately, annual budget time comes around so you can see a projection of income for the following year.

You can view your city at different perspectives and distances, or even underground. You'll need to use all of the angles, too, because SimCity, like Maxis's A-Train before it, uses richly textured 3-D terrain and buildings. The underside of your simulated city is important because you are responsible for maintaining the water system. You can build pipes, desalinization plants, storage towers, treatment facilities, and water pumps. With the added dimension to your city you have to build pipes up and through hills and mountains, as well as over the rivers and through the woods.

Underground is also home to subways, one of several forms of public transit available. Sims are no longer relegated to one form of public transportation. In addition to roads and rail (which require railroad stations), there are highways, subways, and buses.

SimCity 2000 is truly full of surprises—something unexpected crops up every time. If your citizens like your work, they may throw a parade in your honor; if they don't, they may riot. Low populations mean abandoned buildings. Heavily populated futuristic cities can have "arcologies"—huge domed cities-within-a-building.

You can start by building your city on bare land, or begin with one of several scenarios (such as Oakland, Charleston, and Hollywood) in which you must overcome a problem or disaster (such as flies, flooding, or a space alien attack). The pre-made scenarios are so enjoyable that you may never want to create a city from scratch.

SimCity 2000 is almost perfect. Unfortunately, the game only runs on 256 colors or shades of grey. (It requires a Mac LC or faster running System 7 or later; a PC version is also available.) The simulation runs rather quickly, even on huge cities, but scrolling around the city, zooming, and rotating the view can be slow. SimCity 2000 also crashed inexplicably until we booted without our usual cadre of system extensions.

SimCity 2000 is definitely Maxis's most inspired work to date. Loyal SimCity Classic enthusiasts will adore 2000's new features, tools, and wit. Those new to city management, as well as Classic gurus, will find hours of pleasure in one of the finest Macintosh games ever. ■

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